

Other Cloaks, Other Daggers—I

The CIA Has Company

First of a series

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PARIS—While violating the American understanding of the limits of espionage activities, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency is not a maverick in the shadowy international fraternity of the world's major spy networks.

CIA involvement in assassination plots, domestic surveillance and exported subversion as disclosed by the U.S. Senate appears to fall within the normal rules of the game, as it is played by the world's most powerful espionage agencies, a survey by Washington Post correspondents of the British, French, West German, Soviet and Chinese services indicates.

Ranging in size from France's 2,000-member official spy agency to the Soviet Union's vast KGB apparatus of half a million, foreign cloak-and-dagger organizations appear to play the game at least as roughly as the CIA.

The publics they serve or surveil do not appear to be as easily shocked by intelligence-style dirty tricks as the Americans are. The major foreign services come out of societies with long histories in which Byzantine conspiracies are assumed to be an integral part of public life.

Even in America's sister democracies, while there may be jaded expressions of disapproval for intelligence agency plots, there are rarely any expressions of outright surprise, especially not from the countries that claim to be new societies forged by revolution from Old Russia and the Middle Kingdom of China.

The major agencies of the Old World have all been quick to use the dagger when their interests were threatened. Each of the Western spy agencies considered has a history of straying beyond its legal charter and of indulging in domestic spying, which is one of the KGB's principal tasks in the Soviet Union.

The size of the dirty-tricks bag each service has employed in disrupting or

overthrowing foreign governments seems to vary with the money and manpower available to it as well as with the economic and strategic importance of the country targeted for action.

The vulnerability of weak Third World nations has also invited covert operations that might otherwise have been skipped. But the bag is made available to each of the spy services by its country's top leaders, and it seems to be only natural to the men working in the shadowy world of espionage to dip into it.

British intelligence stage-manages coups, burgles safes, blackmails the vulnerable and practices many of the curious arts that the CIA investigation has brought into public view, Bernard D. Nossiter reports from London.

"We know very well that men who go into this domain are not little angels," says a Frenchman once deeply involved in his country's dirty tricks sector. "And we would not want them to be. They would be worthless against the kind of enemy we must all fight."

The other major services have managed to keep their cloaks in place much better than the CIA has. None has been subjected to the rough public questioning and disclosures that have made the CIA a major public issue in the United States, and the delicate question of how much political control is exercised

over the spy services has not been raised by official bodies.

There have been internal investigations and purges after intelligence scandals broke into the open in Britain, France and West Germany, but they have been handled inhouse for the most part.

The West German public and Parliament appear to have a higher tolerance of questionable activities by its agency, the BND, Michael Getler reports from Bonn. The generally conservative tilt of the adult population and the country's unique geographical position on the front line with Communist Eastern Europe dampen the desire for the kind of public review undertaken by the U.S. Senate.

In France, the dirtiest tasks have been given to strongarm groups outside the government framework and, according to critics, outside of government control in many instances. This has provided comfortable insulation for French leaders from the nastier aspects of the craft, but it has also led to repeated scandals and the involvement of the country's intelligence groups in drug smuggling, blackmail and gangland murders.

Britain appears to have strong governmental control over its Secret Intelligence Service. Foreign Office advisers sit in on discussions of covert operations and must give their approval.

In the Soviet Union, the question is not just whether

the government controls the KGB, but also whether the KGB controls the government.

The Soviet agency is not just another instrument of the state, as the CIA and FBI clearly are. It is an integral part of the way the country is run, Peter Osnos reports from Moscow.

Its agents and informers have infiltrated every sphere of Soviet life, including the top levels of the government.

The Washington Post's series of reports on the five other major intelligence agencies will suggest that political assassination is a far more commonplace tool in international espionage than the American reaction to the CIA's involvement in plotting against Patrice Lumumba and Fidel Castro would indicate.

Relatively speaking, smaller countries with fewer resources and narrower security margins in which to operate, appear to resort to political murders even more often than the major powers.

Israel's Mossad has tracked down and assassinated more than a dozen Arab operatives and Palestinian leaders outside of Israel in the past three years.

Arab secret services are more often used to murder their own. Iraq, South Yemen and Morocco have ordered domestic political opponents assassinated at home and abroad, as has non-Arab Iran.

With the exception of West Germany, which focused its

continued

earliest destabilizing efforts on Eastern European Communist nations, the other major services have joined the CIA in making the weak states of Africa, the Middle East and Asia the world's main espionage battleground. Latin America appears to have been left as a CIA preserve.

Britain has made a specialty of smoothly deposing incompetent tribal sheikhs in the Persian Gulf to preempt successful leftist revolutions against them. During the rule of Charles de Gaulle, France toppled or preserved the governments France itself had installed in its former colonies in Africa with relative ease.

Britain and France were acting within the power spheres created by their colonial mandates and usually to protect important economic and strategic interests ranging from petroleum deposits in Abu Dhabi to large French air bases in Chad.

The Chinese, H.D.S. Greenway writes from the Far East, seem to concentrate on defensive operations against the Soviets and even seem willing to cooperate with the West in this endeavor. The main asset China has in its intelligence networks is the patriotic feeling of the overseas Chinese throughout the world.

The Chinese, whose espionage manuals date to 500 B.C. at least, may be the

world's oldest systematic practitioners of the intelligence arts. As such, it is presumed that they were not so much shocked by revelations of CIA activities as by the fact that such things could be let out of the bag.

CIA fears that the Senate revelations would seriously impair its relations with other major foreign intelligence services do not appear to have been justified in the first weeks after the disclosures.

Long before the Senate investigation, intelligence exchange was limited either to highly essential matters or to non-sensitive data. U.S. intelligence units in Europe have routinely classified many documents "U.S.-U.K. Only" to avoid their dissemination to any NATO countries but Britain. Other intelligence agencies operate on the same basis.

Aiding that exchange between the British and Americans in particular was that the CIA stemmed directly from wartime secret services that learned their trade at the knees of the British, adopting in the process the British tendency to regard intelligence as a field for the elite largely recruited from Oxbridge in Britain and, until relatively recently, from the Ivy League in the United States.

"Intelligence exchange is a two-way street," a French

counterespionage expert said of Franco-American joint efforts against international terror networks. "If we hold

back, we know the U.S. will also. We may take a little more care now in masking

sources, but the essential information still goes back and forth."

The more lenient attitude that Western European countries take toward their own spy services has been one factor in the muted public reaction on this continent to the disclosures of CIA involvement in murder plots and sabotage in Chile.

European newspapers and other media, preoccupied with the deathwatch over Spain's Generalissimo Francisco

Franco and Portugal's turbulent politics at the time of the release of the Senate

report, devoted comparatively little attention to the report and the Senate hearings.

"France's interests were not affected by anything that was in the report, and the

French tend to take a narrow view on events abroad," a high-ranking French security man said. "Besides, it was difficult for anybody to understand how a government could permit these things to be said."

A leading French political figure offered another explanation: "The average Frenchman's view of the United States comes from movies and television. After he has seen 'Three Days of the Condor' or other spy pictures, why should he be surprised?"

Soviet reaction, however, was loud and sharply critical. Pravda headlined its account, "Murder as an Instrument of Politics" as the Kremlin cashed in on a tempting opportunity to portray the United States as the villain of the Cold War period. The

revelations were also useful to the Soviets in their determined campaign to portray the West as a gross violator of human rights, to counter Western pressure on Moscow to live up to this summer's Helsinki agreement. But the Russians did not say that dirty tricks were beyond their ken.

NEXT: the British Spy